

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE PUBLICATION

# Drama

THE QUARTERLY  
THEATRE REVIEW

EDITED BY IVOR BROWN

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*Some Talks on the Theatre of Today and Tomorrow*

*for Young People*

Monday, December 29 3 p.m.	<b>"LARGER THAN LIFE"</b> Aspects of Acting at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art Introduced by <b>Anthony Quayle</b>	Vanbrugh Theatre Malet Street
Friday, January 2 3 p.m.	<b>TELEVISION THEATRE</b> <b>Michael Barry</b> Drama Director BBC Television Introduced by <b>Ivor Brown</b>	Wyndham's Theatre
Monday, January 5 3 p.m.	<b>THE METHOD</b> Described by <b>Al Mulock</b> and <b>David de Keyser</b> of the London Studio Introduced by <b>John Allen</b>	Wyndham's Theatre
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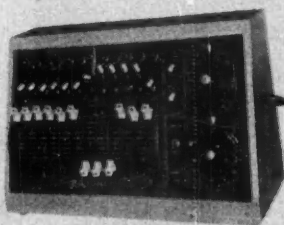
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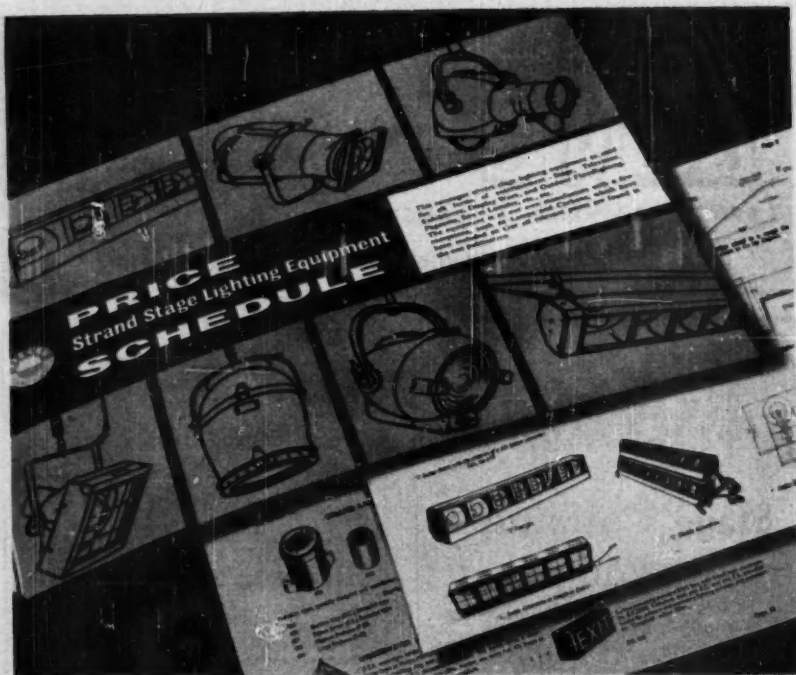
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NEW SERIES

WINTER 1958

NUMBER 51

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Annual Subscription: Inland 9/4; Overseas 9/- (post free)

Editorial, Advertisements and Distribution:

9 Fitzroy Square, London, W.1 (Euston 2666)

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# DRAMA

## *The Quarterly Theatre Review*

Founded by Geoffrey Whitworth in 1919

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NEW SERIES

WINTER 1958

NUMBER 51

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# THEATRE PRICES

**I**T is nearly a century since Sir Squire Bancroft introduced the ten-and-sixpenny stall to the central London theatres. In the eighteen-sixties half-a-guinea was a very large sum of money: it bought, for example, at least three bottles of whisky. In general it is fair to say that, apart from articles whose price is determined by taxation, the Bancroft half-a-guinea was equivalent to at least two pounds in 1958, and probably more. Therefore London's theatre managers can say that the play going public is lucky to be charged only sixteen-and-sixpence or one pound for a stall to-day.

The argument based on the price of stalls alone evades a very important point: that is the price of what used to be cheap seats and are now very dear ones. The half-crown pit and the shilling gallery have been replaced by back-stalls, which in many cases cost ten to fifteen shillings, and by a three-and-sixpenny place in 'the gods'. In at least one London theatre thirteen-and-sixpence is being charged for the Second Circle, a tier which has names of varying kinds from the honest Upper to the bogus Royal. And this after the abolition of the Entertainments Duty, for which the British Drama League was a vigorous campaigner!

When all allowance has been made for Central London rents, the discrepancy between West End prices and those elsewhere is remarkable. Plays touring with full West End companies can be seen, usually before and sometimes after a West End season, at less than half the West End prices. The obvious logic of this is to see the plays in the provinces or the suburbs. But there is another way of escape for those who cannot pay the inflated West End prices.

That is to join a Theatre Club which makes block bookings. After the first few weeks of a run the West End theatre is increasingly dependent on the bus parties from near and even from far, and also on Theatre Clubs made up of Londoners. The reduction on prices for such parties made by most managements is usually a very big one. Naturally, there will not be such bookings for 'smash hits': but not many plays are in this class and the plays that serious playgoers want to see are very rarely 'sold out' for weeks ahead. Thus block-bookings are available and it is an obvious measure of prudence for those who want the best drama and cannot pay full West End prices to join an organisation which can make economical bookings. What is happening in Central London is that the individual ticket-purchaser is subsidising the mass visitor. He may be sitting at a cost of thirteen-and-sixpence next to somebody who has paid eight-and-sixpence or less.

The British Drama League has a flourishing Theatre Club in London which London members of the League should bear in mind. They can also use this fact to urge friends and neighbours to join the League and obtain its other various facilities. Outside London, theatre prices have not risen to a comparable extent, but even so the organised group-visit may provide an evening in congenial company as well as a minor form of economy.

In the country first-rate drama is still available at what may be called in a period of inflation bargain prices. The Belgrade Theatre in Coventry has a top price of seven-and-sixpence and that in an up-to-date and exceptionally spacious and handsome house which it is a pleasure to enter and which provides every

Left: CATHERINE LACEY and IRENE WORTH in Stephen Spender's translation of 'Mary Stuart' by Schiller at the Old Vic. Photograph by Angus McBean.



kind of amenity. Moreover this theatre has its Under Twenty Club which offers most advantageous terms to the young playgoer.

Most 'Reps' offering productions of quality are providing their patrons with a genuine bargain. It may be said that considering the general range of values and incomes existing to-day, they are under-estimating their own goods and might charge more. But their directors know their own business and must conduct their box offices as they think best. What is obvious, as far as Central London is concerned, is the advantage of joining a Theatre Club. It provides congenial company: it saves money: and it may introduce to the pleasure and stimulation of the living theatre those who have been so far unaware of what it has to offer.

## PLAYS IN PERFORMANCE

By J. W. LAMBERT

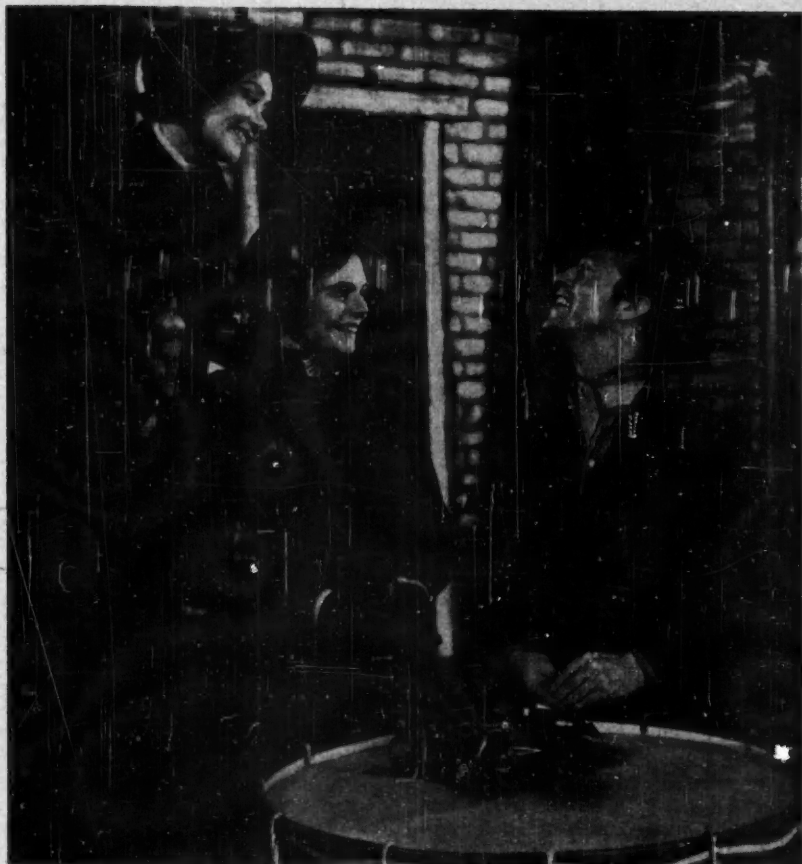
A FEELING for greater flexibility spreads fast through the theatre and—though perhaps it takes a little getting used to—very much to the benefit of all concerned. Little by little we are coming to accept as easily as Shakespeare did the mixture of dialogue and soliloquy and song; of actors stepping into and out of their parts, addressing each other and the audience by turns. And by a lucky chance the summer and autumn of 1958 saw these new—or at least rediscovered—techniques spreading out fast from the experimental theatres to every sort of play, aimed at every sort of audience.

This happy fact has not only much enlivened the theatre; it has helped to liberate the new methods from their apparently indissoluble association with the squalid and the angry. There seemed to be something almost comically apt in the production at the Royal Court of John Arden's *Live Like Pigs*—I intend no disrespect to Mr. Devine, but such a title seemed to combine a good business instinct for the easily remembered with a conscious or unconscious touch of self-parody. Immediately before it came *Major Barbara*; the contrast between these two plays, half a century apart in time, points up a changing habit of mind. Shaw saw it

as his business to use with superficial brilliance characters from a wide range of society, not observed with scientific accuracy but having a truth of their own which has made the rest of us think. Mr. Arden, on the other hand, sticks to the low and lower-middle classes; he has observed them and their idiom with care, but he uses his dialogue to produce an emotional response. Both approaches are legitimate, indeed welcome, in the theatre.

Both plays are fun, if we may be allowed anything so frivolous. I can't think why Joan Plowright wanted to play Barbara; and if she was going to, should she not have polished up her accent a little? But there, this is a problem we should have grown used to. Any actor or actress set to play a low-life part will work extremely hard to improve a low-life accent. But any actor or actress set to play a high-life part will use, in blithe self-confidence, a natural speaking voice. Thus Miss Plowright, though simple and agreeable, didn't at all sound as though she were born and bred in Knightsbridge, just as I have yet to hear an Eliza Doolittle who, however well ground out her cockney, proves herself a credit to Professor Higgins by really learning to speak like a duchess. In the event, Alan





JOAN PLOWRIGHT, JACQUELINE HUSSEY and ALFRED LYNCH in 'Major Barbara' at the Royal Court Theatre. Photograph by David Sim.

Webb's Undershaft, short-winded but sprightly, and Paul Daneman's Cusins, primly on the make, turned the evening into a brisk duel, backed by small-part playing of a notably high standard.

The acting in *Live Like Pigs* was excellent too, as far as it could go. Not that Mr. Arden is afraid of rhetoric; one of the few things he has in common with Shaw is a habit of slipping into uneasy purple patches, here mostly devoted to allowing those who preferred filth and privation to neatness and safety to speak for themselves—his play being simply a

picture of what might happen if you put a bunch of crooks, tramps, fair-ground operators and halfwits in a council-house on a new estate. A ballad-singer, A. L. Lloyd, expertly deployed the usual strangulated whine of the semi-folk singer to point the moral between scenes. The dialogue was, when not briefly rhapsodical, fast and sure and extremely funny. It did, as the evening wore on, become just possible to feel a certain sympathy for these awful people, a corporate Caliban up against the intolerable Prospero of the

Welfare State.

Very like, in many ways, was Brendan Behan's *The Hostage* at the Theatre Royal, Stratford. The scene a Dublin brothel; the characters miscellaneous riff-raff; the plot turning on the introduction of a very young English national serviceman, kidnapped and likely to be shot as a reprisal, though nobody in fact wants this to happen; the theme the folly of such inconsequent passions as destroy the souls of men. Here again a multiple set offers platforms, crumbling walls, staircases, a dirty Dublin skyline. Joan Littlewood brilliantly carpenters a Brechtian production. The actors stop and start, address us or each other, sing and dance—and as Behan is less didactic than Brecht the effect is more pleasing. The name of O'Casey is often produced as a yardstick for Mr. Behan, but precisely what is missing from the younger Irishman is what makes the elder a genius—poetry. I don't of course complain that his lines aren't studded with wild Irish phrases—for that I am truly thankful; yet even the plainest words can in a master's hand turn to gold, and here they don't. All the same *The Hostage* is worth ten of any more decorous straight play in London. It has plenty of squalor, true; but it also has high spirits, warmth of heart, sentiment but I think just not sentimentality, and some splendid acting parts amid the unmade beds and the stout bottles.

Though its audiences would be surprised to know it, Peter Hall has given *Brouhaha*, George Tabori's cheerful farce at the Aldwych Theatre, a touch of Brecht too: familiar English tunes, comically re-orchestrated, divide the scenes, along with a sandwichman with comic notice-boards. I was puzzled by the extreme variation of quality within this piece, which often seemed on the verge of becoming effective satire, but as often relapsed into the lumpish. Still, it was good to see Peter Sellers and to discover for oneself that he is indeed a true comedian. The ruler of an indigent Arab state, ready to try anything to get

a little money, plump, black-haired, ingratiating, but never deeply concealing a lurking joy in destruction, he moves through monologue, horse-play and genuine wit with aplomb.

One more example of the newer techniques: Peter Brook's production of *Irma la Douce* at the Lyric Theatre. Here again we have one of the characters acting as narrator, wandering in and out of the play, we have a multiple set, soliloquies and songs and dances which crystallize a mood rather than further the action. It seems a pleasing paradox that while opera itself moves more and more in the direction of music-drama, straight plays should be borrowing some of the devices of opera. *Irma la Douce* is an amusing fragment of Parisian Runyon, mixing sentiment with *humour noir*; the latter element, it is true, rather toned down in the English version, especially at the final curtain, which should bring a chilling return of the savage jealousy which has impelled the plot. Keith Michell has to work rather evidently hard as the young man who, in love with a prostitute, is eventually reduced to being jealous of himself; but he distils a certain blond gaiety. Elizabeth Seal's Irma is admirably trim, sexy and vivacious—too vivacious; a certain cow-like will to please is the hall-mark of Irma, and Miss Seal's delightful dynamics make of her quite another woman. Strictly, indeed, only one member of the cast caught the authentic Parisian flavour—Clive Revill as the barman-narrator, who combined melancholy and mischief with a shrugging panache usually outside the range of English players.

To anybody over thirty-five Robert Ardrey's *Shadow of Heroes* (Piccadilly Theatre) will have seemed less novel, though it too employed Brechtian stratagems—a bare stage, a few essential props, a narrator who addresses indifferently the other actors, the audience or the stage staff—only one tiny touch of music, though, and that introduced naturalistically. This at-



BEATRICE LEHMANN and BERYL MEASOR in 'Something Unspoken' by Tennessee Williams at the Arts Theatre. Photograph by Angus McBean.

tempt to picture—I won't say dramatise—the events leading up to the Hungarian Revolution is of a kind often attempted in the 1930s. What purports to be unadorned truth cannot, of course, be anything of the sort; here we are asked to accept as a hero a man morally indistinguishable from those we are asked to accept as villains. Out of all his gallery of hagridden conspirators Mr. Ardrey has managed to find only one real character, the universal betrayer Kadar, at once fanatic and ashamed, whose shrivelling soul was wonderfully well embodied by Alan Webb in what seemed, as time and treachery went on, a visibly shrivelling body. Peggy Ashcroft grappled—I think that is the word—with

the displeasing heroine, Julia Rajk, and in a way it was well to have so sympathetic an actress in so unsympathetic a part; but it did seem rather a waste of her time. To tell the truth, our whole picture of these dreadful events was bedevilled by the fact that Emlyn Williams as the narrator, in raincoat and muffler and pulled-down trilby, affecting a carefully dispassionate voice, seemed a great deal more frightening than any of the characters in the play.

Before we move on to what we can still consider as standard theatrical articles let us glance at two programmes made up of a double bill. The Royal Court brought back *The Chairs*, and with it *The Lesson*, by way, I take it, of giving Joan Plowright a chance of play-

ing a woman of ninety-three and a girl of sixteen in the same evening. She did both very nicely; in *The Chairs* her clucking remains enchanting. In *The Lesson*, in which Ionesco does no more, so far as I can see, than amuse himself by tearing language to merry little pieces, and frighten us with a sudden surge into Grand Guignol, she might have clowned a little more—if only to counterpoint Edgar Wreford's splendid Professor, dryly twitching like a twig suspended over a flame of eternal damnation.

Ionesco's little exercise in terror pales alongside *Suddenly Last Summer*; the second of the Tennessee Williams plays presented at the Arts Theatre as *Garden District*. For all its approaches to emotional vampirism, perversion and even fertility rites I cannot think that this is much more than another piece of Grand Guignol; but a very powerful piece. It consists largely of solos and duets, like a Handel opera. With Beatrix Lehmann as a mad mother of a lost loved son the pace was likely to be hot; and as it turned out Miss Lehmann was outdone by Patricia Neal in a long narration which is by far the nastiest thing I have ever heard spoken on the stage. The skill with which Mr. Williams first titillates our curiosity, satisfies it and then brings down the curtain by quietly voicing as it were *ex cathedra* the comment which has been gently rising in all our minds, is something which no theatregoer should fail to admire. Yet there is really more substance to the first and shorter play of the pair, *Something Unspoken*. Two women: one (nobly played by Beryl Measor) rich, important in the community, domineering; the other timid, shrinking, servile, the eternal secretary-companion (and Miss Lehmann, though miscast, plays her with delicious comic gusto). There is tension between them. The rich woman rules the poor woman, the poor woman resents it? Yes, but that's the least of the matter. The secretary has been long enjoying a terrible revenge. For the rich woman loves her, and for fifteen years

has never been allowed even to say so. In the brief exchanges of this little piece there is more warmth than in most of the rest of Mr. Williams's work put together.

I should like to salute Mr. Eliot's *The Elder Statesman* (Cambridge Theatre). Indeed I do so, but with a faint and formal gesture. Why does this poet, whose early verse, no matter how obscure, always mysteriously rings with hidden melody, now doggedly impose upon himself a mode indistinguishable from undistinguished prose? And why, when in *The Rock*, *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion* he was ready to experiment with the best, does he now tie himself down to the conventions of the standard domestic drama at the very moment when the theatre is rapidly escaping from them?

Paul Rogers undertakes the second of his studies in Eliot's old regretful men. Everything he does is right; Lord Claverton lives and breathes before us—but this is not enough; whether the fault is author's or actor's. A hollow man at the centre of a play kills it; in portraying such a man author and actor must pierce the shell—nature abhors a vacuum, there is always *something* there. E. Martin Browne has deployed his puppets with reverence but, except in the case of Eileen Peel, a bediamonded figure from the lighter side of the theatre, the piece is not well cast; and the result, I am afraid, is a thin, likeable failure.

Peter Shaffer's *Five Finger Exercise*, on the other hand, is a rather unlikeable success. Strictly conventional in form, it is also strictly conventional in feeling, and in its picture of family life—philistine father, snobbish mother, bright little sister, misunderstood sensitive son—might have been written thirty years ago. Mr. Shaffer writes sharp dialogue and isn't afraid of a good burst of rhetoric. And I shall always welcome a dramatist who provides good acting parts for Roland Culver, most subtle of quietists. His portrait of a golfing businessman of good will, despised by those





PAUL ROGERS and ANNA MASSEY in 'The Elder Statesman' by T. S. Eliot at the Cambridge Theatre. Photograph by Houston Rogers.

he wishes to cherish and be cherished by, is all a matter of turns of the head or simply the eyes, fractional hesitations, unstressed pauses—and it is a little masterpiece. As his son Brian Bedford does well to redeem this tiresome sort of character from our all too ready irritation; but Michael Bryant, as a young German who provides a little emotional complication, seemed to me too ready to overplay conventional Teutonic elements.

*Long Day's Journey into Night* at the Globe Theatre was for me an event of such side-splitting tedium that I hardly care to offer a critical opinion upon it. The knowledge that the whole thing

was in effect autobiographical gave the piece a certain painful edge; otherwise ribaldry would have been the only possible response to this ludicrous sequence of drink, drugs, quarrels and reconciliations—true to life but not to art. Gwen Frangcon-Davies did well for the drivelling mother; Anthony Quayle understood the disastrous father well enough but could not find the stature to carry off a role of this scale. And as the two brothers Ian Bannen was, in his highly individual way, a rather noble flame of agony, while Alan Bates offered in this Irish-American household a timorous North Midlands accent.

A belated attempt to interest us in



BRIAN BEDFORD, ADRIANNE ALLEN, MICHAEL BRYANT and ROLAND CULVER in 'Five Finger Exercise' at the Comedy Theatre. Photograph by Angus McBean.

the works of Gabriel Marcel brought to the Arts *Les Chemins de Crête*, translated by Rosalind Heywood and now called *Ariadne*. A study in Lesbianism, of a woman stealing away first her brother's wife, then her husband's mistress, this is also a highly intelligent discussion of our frequent failure to understand our own motives. Helen Cherry seemed to me to understand very well the complex substance of this play, and so did Michael Warre as the inevitably down-trodden husband. But neither could infuse much fire into what was essentially an intellectualised case-history.

I must, for the record, note that Beatrice Lillie has chosen to return to London in *Auntie Mame*, a bad play made from a bad book. Miss Lillie's range of satiric effect was never large and is here unsuited to her role; the result, in an ill-mounted and ill-conceived production, was deeply embarrassing.

Among the revivals most interest was, or should have been, generated by the chance which brought Stephen Spender's useful translation of Schiller's

*Mary Stuart* to the Old Vic while a visiting company from Düsseldorf played it at Sadler's Wells. The Old Vic won hands down. The play has its moments—notably those which owe least to history, and especially that in which Mary and Elizabeth have a stupendous shouting-match, whips are flourished and the heavens tremble. Here both Irene Worth and Catherine Lacey rose with relish to the situation. The German players certainly provided solidity. They brought three plays: besides *Maria Stuart*, Hauptmann's *Michael Kramer*, a lugubrious piece worthy of O'Neill at his worst, and Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*, relatively lively, and relatively modern in its mockery of excessive pride in race or creed. Ernst Deutsch, said by some to be Germany's greatest living actor, played Nathan; he is certainly a good actor, but in the sixteenth row of the stalls was largely inaudible.

Michael Hordern, on the other hand, was largely inaudible in the sixth row of the stalls in *Julius Caesar* at the Old Vic—and I never expected to make



that complaint against this actor. The production as a whole, handsomely mounted, has an even more handsome Antony in Ronald Lewis; but don't be misled—Mr. Lewis is also a good actor. He has fire and feeling and control. But the interest, such as it is, in this fragmented play lies in the doings of Brutus and Cassius; and, alas, Mr.

Hordern's Cassius and the Brutus of John Phillips shrugged up out of the Roman crowds like a couple of fussy old spinsters. Long before the end I began to feel that Douglas Seale, the producer, would have had more fun (and so should we) if these two parts had been played by Catherine Lacey and Irene Worth.

## HARD OF HEARING

By IVOR BROWN

THERE is no criticism of the contemporary theatre that I meet more often than the complaint about inaudibility. In my own experience, that grievance seems frequently to be well-grounded. When a critic censures inaudible acting he may be told that he is growing old and hard of hearing and ought to see a doctor. I do not find myself hard of hearing in ordinary conversation or at a public meeting; yet I am frequently straining to hear what the players are saying on a stage, and quite often the strain is ineffective. I do not, despite my efforts, hear properly. The fact that others grumble likewise confirms my view that it is not I who need a doctor but the actors who need a sharp reminder and, above all, the producer who needs a vigorous protest, since he both permits muttered speech and puts his players in awkward back-to-the-audience positions which make clear communication difficult.

Certain forces, comparatively new to theatrical life, are at work to create inaudibility. A large number of professional players, gainfully employed, find their income far more assured if they make only rare appearances in a theatre. Let anybody look through a week's issue of *The Radio Times* and *The TV Times* and count up the number of artists engaged. Apart from

TV, the B.B.C.'s sound programmes provide a very wide range of work throughout the year. There are also casts employed in Schools' Broadcasts which are not always listed. Microphone acting, whether for film, television or sound radio, demands a use of the voice quite different from that of normal theatre. It is a case of speaking in, not of speaking out.

I sometimes encounter this difficulty myself on platforms supplied with 'mikes'. (Far too many platforms are thus equipped: I am sure that in many halls or rooms with 'mikes' the ordinary voice properly used would be perfectly well heard, as it was in times past). If the speaker stands back at all and still trusts to the 'mike' he may become, if still using a microphone voice, very hard to hear. With a 'mike', the speaker never quite knows what is happening. This does not apply to broadcasting studios where the producer and the technicians can control 'the level'. But obviously one who is accustomed to speaking down to a 'mike' will forget the technique of speaking out to an audience. Thus an actor who spends most of his time in studios will naturally, unless continually prodded, underestimate the amount of voice needed when he returns to a stage. That is one reason why amateur actors, who do not often play with microphone aids, tend

to be more audible than professionals even if they have never had voice-training.

It is significant that, if you read old theatrical criticism, you rarely find inaudibility among the faults mentioned. One of the most famous pieces of dramatic criticism is Hamlet's advice to the Players which obviously embodies Shakespeare's opinions. Shakespeare complained of gagging. He also complained of ear-splitting noise and bellowing: he said nothing whatever of lines thrown away and voices under-pitched. Yet, with the open-air conditions and an audience addicted to cracking nuts and making audible jests, the business of making oneself heard must have been quite a problem. Again, in the criticisms of the last century, you may often find reference to lines delivered with wrong emphasis, but you do not meet the censure of mumbling that is common among members of the audience as well as among critics to-day. There is no doubt that the actors of previous generations made audibility what we call 'a must', as indeed it should be. Their likely fault was over-speaking. It is the paradox of our time that in a world where mechanism is cunningly applied to increase audibility, we often, at least in the living theatre, get audibility diminished to an infuriating extent.

Another cause of the trouble is that production aimed at realistic effects encourages simulation of the careless, conversational speech of our time. I have actually heard an actor say that what he wanted to do was to convey a general effect: the exact words were not essential. What the author of the play concerned would have said to this I do not care to think. Certainly there is a cult of the 'throw-away' technique in modern acting of modern plays: the player believes that you can make a point more effectively by scarcely making it at all. Sometimes the trick comes off; more often, it is a maddening and baffling affectation. It is worth remembering that the prime exponent

of modern realistic acting and of the seemingly casual style, Sir Gerald du Maurier, was never inaudible. I saw and heard him perfectly for many years in many parts and from many parts of the house. I did not have to strain my ears. But other and more recent practitioners of this kind of acting do not appreciate that 'seemingly casual' is quite different from being actually casual and so letting lines go for nothing.

Furthermore, there is the damnable vogue among modern producers of directing their players to speak with their back to the audience. Of course, stage positions in which all the characters are facing or half-facing the audience are not true to life: we do get ourselves grouped otherwise in our social chatter for the good reason that we are not performing to be heard. This 'back-to-the-audience' fashion should be fought hard. The public surely pays to see the faces and the expressions of the players, not the back of their heads, or the contours of their rumps. By paying for seats it also pays the actors the compliment of wanting to see them and the author the compliment of wanting to hear what he wrote. It is preposterous that it should be deprived of both.

This 'back-to-the-audience' nuisance is not restricted to modern realistic plays. We are getting it in the classics too. Some contemporary producers of Shakespeare apparently think that his words are not worth the hearing; so they are concerned more with the grouping and movement of their players than with the delivery of a mighty or a tender line. In the recent production of Stephen Spender's version of Schiller's *Mary Stuart* at the Old Vic, important speeches were killed, at least for me, by the producer who gave Irene Worth positions that compelled her to speak right away from the audience. I believe that the time has come for our senior and leading players, who possess the authority of their achievements, to assert themselves and refuse to be pushed into hampering stances by producers of much less

experience. A little direct action of this kind might do a lot of good.

Another frightening feature to-day is the extent to which actors are concerned with 'feeling the part' and unconcerned with projecting it. This brings me, inevitably, to the vogue of something arrogantly called 'The Method'—as if there were only one method! I have listened to several discussions of 'The Method' by actors who think it splendid: but they have been totally unable to define it intelligibly and to show in what way it is original. One thing has struck me very clearly as I listened to their whirling words. They are so much interested in getting the feel of a part, in reconstructing and reliving the emotions of the character, that they are sadly negligent of the best way to convey that 'feel' to an audience. If I say that 'The Method' is a Mumbler's Charter I shall be derided by the Method-fanatics. But I believe it to be true. It is not enough for an actor to be intensely sincere, to avoid old tricks and to have the right emotions inside him. He has got to present those emotions in words heard all over the house and with a

physical expression that is clearly visible as the words are clearly audible. Anything else is cheating the audience of value for its money. To put it crudely, inaudible acting is a swindle.

It seems to me that the standard of diction on our stage is now low, and getting lower. Do our schools of acting sufficiently stress the need for distinct delivery and strong communication? Has not the dread of being 'ham' become so dominant that the young player would rather be half mute than wholly heard? Are our young producers so much obsessed with non-aural effects, achievements of 'atmosphere' and unconventional grouping that they neglect both the essence of the play, which is the words written by the author, and the service of the audience with a performance faithful to those words?

These are questions constantly occurring to me as I watch (and fail to hear) some of the productions of to-day. And sometimes it is hard enough to see, let alone to hear, since some producers' notions of lighting consist so largely of 'darking'. But that is another story.

## DICTION TO-DAY: A REPLY

By JOHN FERNALD

*Director of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art*

**M**R. IVOR BROWN is aggravated by inaudible actors—and very rightly too. Not to be heard in the theatre is an unforgiveable sin, but it is a sin which, in my view, happens less frequently to-day than in the past. It usually occurs because the actors are badly educated—either generally or theatrically, or both. Sometimes it happens because they are just plain lazy. And sometimes these lazy sinners, believe it or not, deceive

themselves into believing that inaudibility can even be a virtue.

Not so long ago I heard a distinguished elderly actor, whose name is well known to every theatregoer, give his views to an audience of drama students. To my dismay he told them in the course of his lecture that *an actor need not always be heard*. Quite unconscious of the effect of this on young people about to enter the profession, he went on to justify this remark by

referring to the other methods of histrionic statement—gesture, stance, tone, facial expression, and so on. His general thesis was to the effect that these other methods could often serve for actual speech, thus making clarity of diction not necessary at all times.

On the surface such a view could seem plausible, provided the occasions of planned inaudibility were few and far between. But the dangers are obviously great, and outweigh any possible advantages. Was this distinguished old gentleman aware of the irritation to the audience of half-hearing a piece of dialogue without knowing whether they were meant to hear it or not? (That there should be absolute certainty as to intention behind all theatre practice is, or ought to be, a first principle.) Did he realise, moreover, that there is more than simple audience-reaction to be reckoned with? What of the loss of tension and sustained interest in an audience some parts of which are whispering sibilantly to their neighbours 'What did he say?'

This supporter of planned inaudibility is of Mr. Brown's generation—and the sinners are more often to be found in that generation than among our younger performers. But much of the fault undoubtedly lies with producers—though not, I think, for the reason that Mr. Brown suggests. There is a proper technique of voice production which can make any actor perfectly clear with his back to the audience.

There is no reason therefore why a producer—who must employ every means at his command to achieve dramatic contrast—should not face his actors upstage from time to time to avoid monotony of grouping. But if he is not a producer *who is interested in language*, he will neglect to use actors who have a voice technique, or, if he does have properly equipped actors, he will neglect to tell them where their duty lies, since he will not be fully

aware of that duty himself.

Nowadays the vast majority of the younger generation of actors have a well-grounded voice technique which they have learnt at dramatic school. A dramatic school training is to-day a pre-requisite for entry into the professional theatre. And Mr. Brown may be assured that reputable schools do a lot more than merely to 'stress the need for distinct delivery and strong communication'. The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and the Central School of Speech and Drama teach a common method and teach it hard. A student at the R.A.D.A. spends most of his first year's training in learning and practising breath control with resonant clear diction, and he is not allowed to act in the public performances at the Vanbrugh Theatre until he has proved that he has learnt his voice technique.

But this technique can become rusty: effort and practice are constantly necessary to keep it up. It is up to producers to have themselves a high standard and some knowledge in regard to speaking, and when they lack this the deterioration in the standard of performance is marked. There is no good play and no company of good actors that a producer cannot make the poorer.

The standard of speech in the theatre is, however, improving. Drama schools are not only turning out a younger generation of actors with a proper appreciation of language, they are also beginning to have some effect in turning out producers who have had a full voice training. Moreover playwrights to-day tend no longer to write the kind of play which encourages the 'throw away' technique—words matter far more to dramatists than they did.

And 'The Method' (which is a system for giving expressiveness to the non-literary drama as well as for making not very good actors feel much better) is not likely to make much headway in this country while our writers continue in their present course.



# A NATIONAL THEATRE

By W. BRIDGES-ADAMS

IT is commonly held that the Irish climate is not conducive to sustained activity. There is a famous tirade on the subject in *John Bull's Other Island*. One historian has surmised that the ill-fated Earl of Essex came to grief because that soft, thick air was too much for him. An Englishman of reflective habit, domiciled in Ireland, will find himself confronted every morning with the temptation to eat a hearty breakfast, light his pipe, and settle down to eight hours' good solid dreaming.

On the other hand, when an Irishman of any considerable endowment escapes to England there is, it seems, no holding him. The annals of the British army, of the bar and (as concerns us here) the stage are rich in Irish names. True, they are for the most part Anglo-Irish names, betokening Protestant ascendancy stock. But in the theatre at least, from Congreve, Farquhar, Goldsmith and Sheridan to Wilde, Shaw and beyond, it is the Irishness that wins us: an inconsequence more persuasive than strict logic, a natural mastery of the cadences of speech, a flair for placing the word that matters exactly where it will best strike the mind or fancy. One can reshape the liveliest epigram of Wilde and make it dull. Perhaps the most endearing line Sheridan ever wrote is Lady Teazle's 'And chuck me under the chin, you would'. Supposing she had said 'And you used to chuck me under the chin'?

This odd felicity of expression, which gives charm and style to the most casual utterance, is still frequent in the Irish countryside. You are warned off a muddy road because if you take it you will be destroyed altogether. If you give a little girl a lift you must not be surprised when she thanks you with the courtliness of an ambassador. It springs from something much remoter than the

splendid talk of eighteenth-century Dublin. My own belief is that in this Irish-English there is an echo of the immemorial Gaelic, a language of poets and kings.

Gaelic, sedulously fostered in the schools, is not spoken nowadays as generally as Welsh is spoken in Wales, although indeed there is a Gaelic theatre in Galway. The Gaelic revival of our time began in great part as an assertion of the national spirit in defiance of English rule. One form of that assertion was the resolve that it was not enough for Ireland to go on feeding the English drama; she must have a drama of her own. Yeats, from on high, set about supplying it, albeit in English. From below, the brothers Fay were busy with amateur theatricals, playing farcical sketches, also in English, in any Dublin hall that offered them some kind of stage. But they were after higher things and already Frank Fay was studying the origins and policy of the Théâtre Libre and similar institutions abroad. Both of them were mad about acting, but it became clear to them that a new kind of acting was needed; the accent and idiom that were employed to raise a laugh must become a vehicle for the expression of Irish character; they pronounced, in short, the doom of the comic stage Irishman. Their work and writings brought them in contact with Yeats, and *Kathleen ni Houlihan* was the outcome. When the ancient hag who was Ireland became 'a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen', the national drama was in being.

It was soon received with international acclamation; Yeats, Synge, Lennox Robinson, Sean O'Casey, Denis Johnston: these names, and others, are now celebrated in two hemispheres. The story is told afresh in Mr. Gerard Fay's



admirably documented book<sup>1</sup>. It is pleasant that he makes due acknowledgment to the Englishwoman who in these years served Yeats as secretary. Her name was Miss Horniman, and she was middle-aged, purposeful, drama-minded and well-to-do. She had backed *Arms and the Man* in 1894; ten years later she came forward with the money that was needed to convert two half-derelict buildings into the Abbey Theatre. When at last she discontinued her subsidy and betook herself to Manchester she had spent more than twenty-five thousand pounds. There are some interesting speculations as to the causes of the split: jealousy, perhaps, of Lady Gregory's authority, a fierce dislike of the 'wicked politics' that seemed persistently to intrude on the domain of art, a total inability to adapt herself to the administrative methods of the Fays. What matters is that she gets her tribute.

Before the final rupture the Fays themselves had departed; the book, despite the author's filial sentiment, maintains a nice balance on the question whether this was an irreparable loss. They had not established an all-Gaelic National Theatre, but they had seen the metamorphosis of Irish-English into an unparalleled instrument of national expression. The foremost exponent of this wizardry was Synge. Somewhere in Max Beerbohm's collected criticisms you will find his appreciation of *Riders to the Sea*. I wonder how many Englishmen recall the first impact of *The Playboy of the Western World*? It was as though a great composer had woven folk-tunes into a symphony; now they have made a 'musical' of it, and some of us bewail the subtler melodies and rhythms that (they say) are lost. The acting was of a quality quite foreign to the West End, just how accomplished we could not tell; all we knew was that we were breathlessly following the fortunes of a number of people who were not so

<sup>1</sup> *The Abbey Theatre* by Gerard Fay. Hollis & Carter. 21s.

much acting as being. The ensemble was impeccable, the setting Rembrandtesque; chairs, tables, pots and pans, the tea stewing on the turf fire, all had a glint of magic. Outside was the nothingness of the bog, sepia and silver, inexpressibly wistful; that old backcloth was lost in the fire of 1951. My first Pegeen Mike was Maire O'Neill. The book has two photographs of Sarah Allgood; I wish there had been room for one of her lovely sister.

There is a faithful account of the hooting of this play on its first appearance before an Abbey audience. Reading it, one begins to understand what Miss Horniman meant by 'wicked politics'. It was inevitable that some Irishmen should regard the Abbey as primarily a *machine de guerre*. For them, the national drama must at all costs proclaim the virtues of the Irish race, and it was intolerable that a sweet Irish girl should be shown as harbouring a confessed murderer. There was the same hullabaloo over O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*: a poet's truth is not a partisan's. And to some extent even to-day the Irish National Theatre is embarrassed by the conflicting claims upon it. It is required that the actors shall be able to act in Gaelic, very properly no doubt, although when they act in Gaelic the audience is usually small; but that rather restricts the choice of actors. It is also expected that, in these changed times, the Abbey shall continue to beget noble drama. Under British dominion there were large-hearted plays sounding the note of resistance. To write large-hearted plays about Partition may not be so easy, although Mr. Brendan Behan has recently shown that it can be done. Are '98 and the Easter Rising sources that will never run dry? One may hope so, as succeeding generations rediscover them. What remains? Comedy at least, superlative comedy in *This Other Eden*, which laughs hereditary animosities to limbo. What else? As staple diet, can the Abbey audience live indefinitely on a genre drama of Irish provincial life,



**MISS HORNIMAN**

*'Miss A. E. F. Horniman who has endowed both the Irish National Theatre and the Manchester Repertory Theatre' is the inscription written by William Archer on the back of this photograph from the Library of the British Drama League. At the close of the Manchester experiment this Library was enriched by the gift of the rehearsal scripts, prompt copies, manuscript parts and music scores of most of the plays performed in the first repertory theatre in this country, the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, which has just celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. The British Drama League marked the occasion by a display in its Library of some of these treasures; among them the first night programme and prompt copy of Hindle Wakes, photographs of Prunella, The Critic, Major Barbara, and of some marked parts where, for example, Sybil Thorndike played Malkin in The Whispering Well.*

even with such craftsmen as Mr. T. C. Murray and such plays as *Mungo's Mansions*? There can scarcely be another *Playboy* when Pegeen Mike has a radio and a plug-in kettle from the E.S.B. Meanwhile, not far away across the Liffey—the Abbey is temporarily housed at the Queen's—there is the Gate Theatre, where all through the war Hilton Edwards and Micheal MacLiammoir kept Dublin, somehow, in contact with the drama of the whole world. According to one school of critics the Abbey needs refertilising from overseas if, founded as a playwright's theatre, it is to evoke the fine plays that evoke fine acting. To which another school may well reply that here at all events is a state-subsidised National Theatre of fifty-four years' standing (where is ours?), and that nothing that has ever been said against it has seriously threatened its stability.

One point must be made in the Abbey's favour. It has itself fertilised the Irish amateur stage. The drama festivals, culminating every year in the All-Ireland Festival at Athlone, are a revelation. The country is full of natural actors who are endowed with the gift of musical and dramatically effective speech. Shakespeare and Ibsen have no terrors for them, nor has Anouilh; they are nonplussed only by the elegantly slipshod diction of English comedy c. 1930. It is rather moving, after the show, to see a vintage saloon heading away into the murk with its human freight, their properties and, on last nights, their trophies. There may be a hundred miles before them, over the mountains, because they have to be back at their jobs next morning. This dreamy climate is not too much for the ardour of the Irish amateurs.

And not only are the Irish born actors; the Dubliners in particular are born playgoers. Trained playgoers, too; the English manager will do well to remember that their home-made standards are high. Their own people have familiarised them with the strange disturbance of the spirit that attends great

acting; one has only to think of Siobhan McKenna in *St. Joan* or MacLiammoir in *Tolka Row*. No audience is quicker on the uptake or more responsive when it is pleased, none more chillingly polite when it is disgusted with the trash we sometimes send it.

These lines were already on paper when news came that Lennox Robinson was dead. An Abbey dramatist at twenty-two, manager at twenty-four and a director through three eventful decades, he was the one remaining link with the great past. To those who mourn him most the blow was not unexpected, for he clearly intended to die in harness, giving the last beat of an enfeebled heart to the causes he believed in. It seemed absurd to think of him as the grand old man of the Abbey, which in fact he was, because almost to the end he retained his youthfulness of voice, of bearing and of mind. But there was a distinction about him that made him an admirable envoy of the Irish theatre to Scandinavia, to Paris, even (when he was in his seventies) to Peking. It is some measure of his integrity that he was exactly the same Lennox when he was castigating, always benignly and helpfully, a group of village players from the wild west of County Cork. He was a Litt.D., and as a playwright he had hit the headlines in London and on Broadway; of his twenty-three plays some will undoubtedly live. How many men of equal eminence in either sphere would sit up half the night, night after night in draughty halls, expounding to unskilled performers the contrivances, mysteries and glories of their art? More and more, as he grew older and it became the thing to say this and that about the Abbey, he fostered the amateurs, tirelessly and as a labour of love; partly because his sympathies went out to anyone, however humble, who wanted to do a play, partly no doubt because he knew that a national drama must draw its lifeblood from the nation. He was laid to rest in the cathedral of St. Patrick; it was an honour that would never have occurred to him.

# CHRISTMAS IN THE PROVINCIAL THEATRE

By NORMAN SHRAPNEL

ONCE knew some people in the Midlands who played theatrical games at Christmas, in one of which you had to recall and recite lines that had particularly entranced you in your theatre-going. The audience then had to identify them and try and place them production-wise. This jolly and high-minded few hours I invariably found gruesomely humiliating, and they nearly put me off the theatre for life. I seemed to be able to recall nothing that was not inappropriate or impossible. Once, I remember, I was idiotic enough to try Olivier's famous 'Oh! Oh!' in *Oedipus Rex*, which Kenneth Tynan described as a cry so tortured 'that it must still be resounding in some high recess of the New Theatre's dome; some stick of wood must still, I feel, be throbbing from it.' My own interpretation hit a lower mark, and the nearest anybody got to guessing it was to suggest that it might be one of the meat-pie victims in a Tod Slaughter melodrama. I settled for that, for sheer shame.

Do great productions leave great lines decorating the memory like banners? I doubt it: I had better doubt it, for if that proposition is true I am wasting my time going to plays. If I ask myself at this time of year what theatrical line comes marching most insistently into my head, the answer is likely to be provided by some pantomime dame—George Lacy, say, delighted that the golden eggs are beginning to roll in and avidly announcing 'At last—rich beyond the dreams of Aberystwyth!' If this seems insufficiently dignified and I press myself further, what I next pull out from the bran-tub of theatre memories is Beatrice Lillie's mystical

line, all passion and no context, '*Bonjour* to all the little kittens all over the world!' Others may do better at this game.

Even for me it sets off memories of rich and strange Christmas fare in the provincial theatre—an assortment various enough, it may be, to surprise those who simply equate Christmas with pantomime and leave it at that. I intend to say little about pantomime here—others more qualified have written amply on the subject—beyond mentioning a quaint version of *Jack and the Beanstalk* I saw in Manchester, devised for politically conscious children only, in which the dame, far from rich beyond the dreams of Aberystwyth, was a haggard victim of capitalistic exploitation, and the giant symbolised atomic energy. Sadly wrong, no doubt, and in conflict with pantomime's true spirit: but not more so, it seems to me, than a tendency developing in recent years to make pantomime far too sophisticated. It is a characteristic provincial failing to want to be smart and up-to-the-minute at all costs, and so we get radio and television stars with no pantomime talents at all grafted on to shows like expensive sore thumbs. I deplore this. The traditional figures have built up a collective identity that amounts to a sort of genius, and there ought to be a National Society of Pantomime Dames pledged to fight these corruptions.

But it is of the week or so before Christmas, before the pantomimes take over, that I have such ranging recollections. This is the time of year when Gracie Fields would come home to some northern city and give it the works—fling her cloak to the pianist like a bull-



fighter, deliciously pierce our nerves with a high, ice-cold stab of mock opera ('Leek a golden dream!'), and then plunge with enormous if deplorable grace into sentimental depths. It was at Oldham in 1914, incidentally, that she made her only pantomime appearance. For myself, it happened to be at this time of year that I fell utterly and eternally beneath the spell of Miss Lillie.

I remember it too as the characteristic time of Novello-land, of curious enterprises like a stage version of *Snow White*, and of all those things on ice: it makes one shiver to remember them. What on earth was the cause of that theatrical ice-age? And even more oddly—all those things in water, queer fish dangling on extraordinary publicity lines. There was a thing called *Christmas Cascades* which the *Guardian* critic described as the best show he had ever seen produced in a forty-foot tank.

It is also the season, for those who keep their eyes open for such things, when enterprising little theatres are likely to present oddities like a musical *School for Scandal* or the Nahum Tate *Lea* with the happy ending. And it was in the week before Christmas that the Birmingham Theatre Royal, where Macready played Romeo at the age of seventeen and the great Grimaldo wove his fantasies, brought down its curtain for the last time with *The Fol-de-Rols*—'a revusical comedy show, for the highbrows, the lowbrows and the nobrows'. It seemed macabre to give so great a playhouse so jolly a funeral.

Then there are the children's shows at the repertories—presumably for children who are rather above pantomimes, or whose parents do not consider them psychologically or morally sound. I have a great admiration for some of these, which are pretty and clever and occasionally quite charming. All the same, I personally tend to associate them with those poor little rich boys and girls, lonely and a shade delicate, who go off to Scarborough late in the season, when the common children

have left, with nursemaids and sad little silver buckets. A bit out of this world? Nonsense, Nicholas Stuart Gray and some other children's writers would be swift to reply: they watch reactions most carefully and think themselves pretty dab-hands at child psychology! The truth is, of course, that parents should be far less arrogant and far more experimental in deciding on the sort of show that children will like.

As for the adult Christmas shows, those repertories like Birmingham and Liverpool which have developed a tradition in this field are fortunate. These pieces are often the backbone of the year's finances and need to provide at least a modicum of acting satisfaction if they are not to be bad for everything except the box-office. Liverpool's recent experiments in providing its own 'musicals' might usefully give a lead to others. The parts are tailor-made for the regular players, there is a certain party atmosphere which provides fun for actors and audience alike, and the hands-across-the-footlights relationship, so vital for the repertory companies, is furthered. The point is that everybody has to have a Christmas show now, whether they like it or not, and it is terribly important to avoid being cynical about it.

And there is no reason—there is already plenty of evidence for asserting it—why they shouldn't be good theatre as well as good money. Why should such entertainments not grow more instead of less 'local'? Regionalism, regarded with a (largely justified) horror until lately, now looks as though it may develop in new directions: and this may be one. As a counterblast to the stupid smartification of pantomime, it would be wise for these smaller shows to see what they can do in the way of pursuing lines that are at once sharper and more homely. Why should they not have the virtues, say, of a good local newspaper in comparison with a bad national one? Anyway, the Christmas show is going to be the subject of an increasing amount of managerial thinking.



Meanwhile I, for one, give thanks for much that I have already enjoyed. I suspect that I share this feeling with many a suburban upper-brow whose annual lament is that 'there's absolutely *nothing* to see anywhere but these dreary

Christmas shows' — while feeling relieved, deep down, at this holiday from the latest Ionesco, the newest early Anouilh. It can't really be called an ill wind that blows everybody so much good.

## HINTS FROM THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE

By LEO BAKER

THIS is not another paeon in envious honour of our late guests from the Moscow Art Theatre (hereinafter referred to as the M.A.T. for brevity) however much deserved, nor is it an attempt to extend or diminish the very full critical appraisal of their performances already published in the press. We may have gaped in amazement at their ensemble playing, or made some adverse criticisms, but that was all over six months ago. Now those Russian nights can live only in our memories and, we suggest, somewhat in our own performances, for on any count they gave us a superb theatrical experience from which we can learn much. Let us then stir the memories and set about the learning. The intention of this article is to recall, for those who saw, but also bearing in mind the much vaster number who could not attend, some of the features of those performances which we might use in our own productions, especially in our amateur productions.

There are two general observations to note. First it has been said again and again that the M.A.T. differs from all companies in this country in that they have a strong tradition of style, formed over fifty years, and an extraordinary continuity of personnel. Many of their players have been with them for a generation and more. The gifted

girl we saw as Anya in *The Cherry Orchard* in a few years may hope to play Varya in the same play, finally maturing into Madame Ranevsky. The Chekhov cycle has been in their repertoire from the beginning, and when these great plays are revived the producers have in mind, so we are told, not 'How can I make this a new and original production?' but 'How can I carry on the tradition and yet make the play even more true, and deeper in significance?' Such continuity is something we cannot look for at present in the professional theatre, but we can look for it and indeed to a humbler degree find it in the amateur theatre. Several members of the Little Theatre Guild of Great Britain consciously seek such a tradition and continuity, and more will no doubt do so with the inspiration of this visit to encourage them. One can hope that ordinary amateur groups also, who do not own their own theatres, will appreciate the benefits which can come from such a policy. Even for them the difficulties are not insurmountable, and the rewards are great.

The other general observation concerns rehearsals. It is popularly supposed here that the M.A.T. rehearses a play for a year or so. This horrifying story appears to be a myth expanded out of the description of the earliest



'THE SEAGULL' by Chekhov. The final scene in The Moscow Art Theatre production, 1898. Reproduced by courtesy of 'The Soviet News'.

beginnings of *My Life in Art* when the new style was first being formed. From all accounts actual rehearsal time does not greatly exceed what we are accustomed to here, but it is used with great intensity. That, they say, is an absolute necessity for achievement. When the moment of rehearsal comes it is passionately believed, as it is not always by us, that this is the time of creative work, and that all who are present, whether on or off stage, should by their behaviour lend as much help as possible to the concentration of the artist-creators. This idea too seems worth a good trial.

When the curtain rose on my first play (*Uncle Vanya*) my attention was at once held by two special features which recurred continuously in the later acts and in the other two plays. These were the use of multiple acting areas, and the relationship between the players. They deserve detailed analysis.

We usually regard mid-centre stage as the position of maximum weight and the heart of our main acting area. We tend to group players, and with that in mind furniture too, in semi-circles and diagonals round the centre vertical line. It is in that middle point that the 'lead' loves to find himself, slightly upstage to everyone else. We teach amateur producers to avoid the horizontal line at all costs. We are

used to wings on the diagonal, with a short side back stage. M.A.T. practice is generally opposed to all this.

To begin with they favoured rectangular sets, with right-angle wings rather than diagonal, with the result that the stage seemed very wide and rather shallow, although there were peeps through windows into the garden, or through arches into a further room. There was sometimes a diagonal wall but the prevailing effect was definitely horizontal. Within the rectangular set they had two or three main acting areas, all of equal value. In some cases the centre vertical line was deliberately destroyed. There was then perhaps a right and a left acting area, of similar weight, and players passed from one to another across the centre, which now became a point of weakness, not strength—a kind of no-man's-land. Furniture arrangement also often impressed the horizontal, even to the extent of a couch or bench down stage exactly square to the audience. (See illustration.) What could justify these unorthodox procedures?

One must always remember that M.A.T. producers are expected to start with the fundamental inquiry 'What is true?' (Stanislavsky said the first rule of rehearsal was to find what was true, then to make the true habitual, and finally to make the habitual beauti-

ful). They do not tolerate effectiveness at the expense of truth. It may be that Russian house interiors in 1904 were differently constructed and appointed from ours. Certainly the impression was given that this was the kind of home this particular family would live in.

And it was firstly a home, not an arranged theatrical set. Truth was emphasised and gave conviction, apart from the playing within it. When it came to the playing, however, it could be seen that having two or three acting areas of equal weight not only helped truth but also allowed greater emotional variety. Each intimate and concentrated little scene could move naturally into its own personal focus in one acting area while at the same time life could go on uninterrupted, if muted, in the other areas.

This is not at all the same thing as 'John moves to table R. and talks with Clara'. In the latter the action moves towards a wing, but the weight on the stage is still centre because the set and method of positioning are designed that way. With the M.A.T. wherever the principal action took place that was also the place of main weight because the importance of the centre line axis had been minimised from the start. There are exciting possibilities here for amateur producers to explore.

But will the audience not be distracted by more than one acting area in operation at the same time? They will unless certain rules are observed. The first is one any reasonable producer accepts as axiomatic: namely, that where the text demands concentration there must be concentration. When John reaches Clara D.R. and says those fatal words so vital to the play, you can't have Mary fiddling about upstage L. at the same time. Not even if Mary considers herself the lead and Clara is that new girl with the awful hair. Mary will be magnanimous and have a nice little rest while Clara is allowed to register her horror at John's

suggestion.

It would be the same with the M.A.T. except that there would be no rest for Mary. They consider it fundamental that while one player may have to hold the audience at a given moment there is no slacking off for the others. They still must go on living to the full, concentrating on a sequence of experience, of thoughts, of feelings, without any lines. Just like life in fact.

The problem is to do this without distracting the audience. The first step to a solution is to have no hierarchy amongst the players. No one has the 'right' to play upstage, or to have a metaphorical spotlight on them. The play is the thing, not the player. Boosting one's personal reputation, an eye to a good notice, or even the thought 'this is my scene' must go, so that each player can concentrate on living his character with the others and reaching the audience, not directly, but through the play. It is for the producer to achieve a contrapuntal rhythm between them so that the attention of the audience will go where necessary, which is by no means always to the speaker. The play may demand that we watch the listener or even some withdrawn character (for instance, Madame Ranevsky at the end of Act III of *The Cherry Orchard*, when we need to receive Lopakhin's speech through her.)

This style of playing does not place such demands on the speaker as one might think, because he knows he must play against movement instead of rigidity. He does not expect the rest to become frozen dummies until he has finished speaking. He knows he will live his part more truly because others exchange glances, laugh, cry or move. His life will in fact be enriched by their life. They live the play rather than act a number of parts together.

These are but a few pointers from these great performances which we can explore; and there is no need to mention 'the Method'.

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'THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST' at Windsor School, Hamm.

## DRAMA AT WINDSOR SCHOOL, HAMM

By J. HOWARD

THE Windsor School at Hamm, a mixed boarding school for children of British servicemen in Germany, is only five years old. The Dramatic Society is even younger, but the enthusiasm of its members is so great that we now have a flourishing dramatic tradition which aims at the highest standard for youthful amateurs.

Our first production was a simple Nativity Play, for which we used the thirteenth century Coventry text. We followed this by a typically 'school' production of *The Merchant of Venice* which was, however, distinguished by the sensitive acting of a thirteen-year-old Shylock, a delightful Launcelot Gobbo, and a specially designed set. By the careful use of interchangeable shutters and lighting we were able to suggest Venetian streets, Shylock's house (with upper window for Jessica), the Court, and the garden at Belmont.

Our German audiences are, of course, knowledgeable about Shakespeare's plays and encouraged by their appreciation we took the bold step of selecting *Hamlet* for our next production, using mainly the Quarto text.

We produced it as a play of action, with an exciting duel, plot and counterplot between Hamlet and Claudius. (One night Hamlet's rapier broke, but without a moment's hesitation he turned to Osric, who was holding the bundle of rapiers, with 'Come, give me another!' and returned with redoubled energy to the fencing match.) We placed the famous soliloquy much earlier, as the Old Vic did last year, and by judicious use of lighting and the movement of the simple pieces of furniture by suitably dressed servants we were able to play without curtains. This gave the play pace and excitement.

Our next production was from a later period, still with an appeal to our German friends—Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. We took care to keep the special quality of this elegant mannered play. Our sets were simple, yet effective. A doorway of white painted wood with cord panels and gold-paper decoration became a formalised Regency door. The garden scene consisted of six rose bushes (like something out of *Alice in Wonderland*), a gate and a stylised willow tree. The costumes



were specially designed from period drawings and photographs. On the first night we were fortunate enough to have Mr. Charles Thomas with us. He said our production was good, but only of 'drawing-room' size. By the fourth night, after much hard work, we achieved an energy and polish that made it difficult to believe that the actors were schoolboys and girls. This production was our turning point. We had always had actors good in this part or that, but now the level of teamwork rose quite suddenly so that everyone seemed to have competence and technique, and no one player stood out. The Dramatic Society was transformed.

The group were anxious to put on Anouilh's *Ring Round the Moon* next; they had read the play at one of our regular readings. But who would be Madame Desermortes, and Messerschmann? I told them that if they could convince me, and themselves, within a fortnight that there was talent enough, we would consider it. And they did. We planned the set, which had four entrances to the stage at different levels,

designed the costumes (lavish ball dresses and evening suits) and were determined to do the play with colour and style to match Anouilh's glittering characters. For the younger members of the audience it was to be a modern fairy-tale; for the older ones an interplay of character and ideas. We had preliminary dress-rehearsals, pondered, and rehearsed again. We tore paper 'money' until the stage looked like Epsom after Derby Day. And then we had the temerity to put the piece on in front of mixed English and German audiences (including quite young children) some of whom had seen the London production. I blush to think of it, but it succeeded.

If our experience has a point for other School and Youth drama groups it is this: Don't put on the 'easy' play you know you can do, but aim a little higher than you think you can possibly reach. And when your members, however young, have shown that they can work as a team, let them have a big say in the choice of play.

## CORRESPONDENCE

Sir,

Actors may not argue with critics about their performances. Authors are allowed to do so, but only on matters of fact. I can hardly quarrel with Richard Ainley if he says that the style of my book *Mask or Face* is 'leggy and coltish', which seem to me preferable qualities to the kind of heavy sentimentality which describes a contemporary performance as recalling Irving and Lemaitre whom Mr. Ainley can never have seen. But there are a few facts which he has got wrong or unintentionally misrepresented.

(1) The title *Mask or Face* was not 'adapted' from William Archer's book, *Masks or Faces*. It was the title I gave to my Harvard Lecture (1956) and the American reprint of Archer's long-neglected book did not come out until 1957, as he will find mentioned in a footnote.

(2) He refers to my notes on Brecht 'back here to us alive'. The notes on Brecht were written and published in *World Theatre* while he was still very much alive, a fact which is made sufficiently clear.

(3) Mr. Ainley says he cannot share my high opinion of the standard of Shakespearean production at the late Old Vic Theatre School. Of course he cannot, for the good reason that I did not mention this aspect of the Old Vic Theatre School's activity.

(4) About 'the Method'. I was at considerable pains to praise certain 'Method' performers. Mr. Ainley implies that I am unaware of the excellence of Mr. Brando,

Mr. Wallach, Miss Geraldine Page and Miss Kim Stanley. They are four of my favourite actors and I maintain it is impossible fairly to form a contrary conclusion from my book. I make it perfectly clear that the (New York) Actors' Studio has done much good work and that I readily believe any of these talented people (and I know most of them personally) when they proclaim their debt to the Studio and to Mr. Strasberg.

Finally, two things which can hardly be called facts. Mr. Ainley hopes that I will 'never lend' myself to the 'horrid new London habit of cutting a Shakespearean play to pieces, keeping the leading part intact and causing the remaining cast to race for their lives that the star may take his blessed time'. If Mr. Ainley has ever seen me a party to this notoriously old-fashioned practice, he should say so. But surely anyone who expresses such a pious hope—he goes so far as to suggest I take an oath on it—is being rather more than 'faintly patronising'.

And what is meant by the title of his review: 'Smell of Success'? I note that he refers to me as a 'busy, successful actor' and I assume he is hinting at the corruption which success is commonly supposed to bring with it. If that is what he means, let him say so and point to the evidence of it in my book. But it is, to put it kindly, unworthy of Mr. Ainley to hint and run.

Yours faithfully,

MICHAEL REDGRAVE

Memorial Theatre,  
Stratford-on-Avon.

# OBITUARY

## George Bell

Dr. George Bell, Bishop of Chichester from 1929 until early this year, who died on October 3, was not only a great churchman of world-wide reputation but a true friend of Drama and the Arts. A man of great charm, his diffidence and modesty concealed a rare intellect coupled with dogged tenacity of purpose. He believed that poets, actors, and musicians should be welcomed back into the churches as in the Middle Ages and he has been truly described as 'the father of modern religious drama'. He was a Vice-President of the British Drama League for very many years, and President of the Religious Drama Society since its foundation.

While he was Dean of Canterbury, he invited John Masefield, Gustav Holst and Charles Ricketts to collaborate in staging a Nativity Play on the great flight of steps leading up to the Chancel Arch in the Cathedral. The reverberations of *The Coming of Christ* in this magnificent setting, the first play to be performed in the Cathedral for nearly 400 years, are still audible—the great wings of the Ricketts angels and the Holst music floating down from the choir screen are still talked about. The previous year (1927) Dr. Bell had founded 'The Friends of Canterbury Cathedral' with the object of bringing all the arts back into relation with religion, and among their many activities they commissioned a whole series of plays by poets which were staged in the Chapter House at their Annual Festival in the thirties and again after the war.

Here it was that *Murder in the Cathedral* was first given, Dr. Bell having proposed to Mr. Eliot in 1934 that he should write a play for the next festival. This was followed with poetic dramas by Charles Williams (1936), Dorothy Sayers (1937 and 1939), Christopher Hassall (1938), and more recently Christopher Fry (1948), whose play *The Boy with the Cart* had been written eleven years earlier mainly owing to the encouragement of Dr. Bell, in whose diocese he was then living. If to-day *Murder in the Cathedral* is performed on the steps of Syracuse Cathedral in Italian or villagers play *The Boy with the Cart* in a Dorset garden, it is because Dr. Bell's enthusiasm brought modern Religious Drama into being. He was the first to create a post within the Church for drama when, in 1930, he appointed Mr. Martin Browne to be Director of Religious Drama in his diocese.

This is but one facet of the activities of this lovable and many-sided man whose knowledge of foreign affairs was both wide and deep, and whose courage was supreme.

JANET LEEFER

## Nugent Monck

The unique achievement of Nugent Monck, who died on October 21, is described in other obituaries—the early shows in his drawing room, the founding of the Norwich Players, his time with the Abbey Theatre Company, Shakespeare in Egypt during the 1914-18 war, the early venture at the Music House and the creation of the Maddermarket Theatre. But the sum of those early achievements can only be appreciated by a backward glance at that bygone period. Things now taken for granted were not so then. This slight frail-seeming little man was not only a producer of erratic but unmistakable genius, but a lion-hearted pioneer, and his work had an enormous influence on producers everywhere and gained for him international recognition.

He would never take 'no' for an answer. He listened patiently to advice but seldom took it. He put on *Oedipus Rex* as an extra show because he wanted to do so. The audiences were thin but there were at least six young people he hadn't seen before in the audience. If Beddoes' *The Second Brother* was known in the Box Office as 'the third mistake' it didn't matter—it hadn't been performed before and he wanted to try it out. Over the years this policy triumphed and after the war the theatre had to be enlarged. His artistic policy at last was vindicated.

As a person it is difficult to say what he was like. If ever a man was inconsistent it was the Little Man. He was extremely generous, but always in a practical way, as the many people he has helped will testify. At the same time he was subject to fits of depressing economy. 'We spend £50 a year on cake in this house', he announced at a tea party. His gaiety was shot through with a streak of melancholy. He was gentle and courteous but a martinet in the theatre and his rages in rehearsal in the old days were fabulous. His apparent frailty hid a daemonic energy and a steely resilience. 'Helplessness is my stock-in-trade', he said to me. He was passionately interested in people and his almost hypnotic charm was combined with great humour and a wit both caustic and Rabelaisian. He was the least pompous person I have ever met and he never bore a grudge. He never looked back; to-morrow to him was always a new day.

To many of us who went in our youth to act at the Maddermarket, Moncklet showed the way to a different world. Our debt to him is enormous—artistically and personally. He was always there, one felt, perhaps older, a little more frail, but still with the same zest, the same enjoyment, the same spirit. His death has left a gap which the years will not fill.

DONALD FITZJOHN

## Gertrude Jennings

I first met Gertrude (who died on September 28) many years ago at an R.A.D.A. *matinée* when we both had the privilege of sharing the box of Sir Kenneth Barnes, then Principal of R.A.D.A. When I was introduced to her she at once attacked me saying 'Your husband (Geoffrey Whitworth) has ruined my career—all these amateurs will act my plays and I shall get nothing. There is nothing to stop them.' This was in 1919 and I am not sure what the royalty conditions were in those days. But she subsequently became a most loyal member of the Council of the British Drama League for the rest of her life, and one of our dearest friends. She told me later that she lived almost entirely on the amateur fees. I suppose her plays were more often acted by amateurs than perhaps any other dramatist's.

Another item which may be of interest is the fact that Gertrude's plays were the very first bought in for the great B.D.L. Library. I know this because at that time I was working in the office and we were asked for the loan of one of her plays. I at once bought the entire set. Subsequently of course the basis of the Library was formed by the magnificent bequest of all Miss Horniman's prompt copies.

Then there were the B.D.L. Conferences. Gertrude always came. She talked to everyone, from the most humble village actor to the great of the theatre world. She was always witty and amusing and helpful in every way. For me, those were the days.

Although Gertrude was a life member of the League, and knew that her expectation of life was not great, she recently sent an extra donation to help its finances.

Gertrude Jennings was a wonderful personality and how glad we were to have her among us to create an atmosphere of sparkle and amusement. There will never be anyone quite like her again.

PHYLLIS WHITWORTH

## Dr. Marie Stopes

Dr. Stopes, who died on October 2, 1958, had been a member of the British Drama League since 1925. Apart from her vigour as a scientist, where her explorations ranged from botany, geology, biology and thence to birth control, Dr. Stopes's interest was captured by the beauty of the traditional Japanese drama. After some years in Tokyo and elsewhere she wrote the book *Plays of Old Japan, the No*, which is both a critical and appreciative account and a short anthology of translated chosen pieces. Dr. Stopes had also ventured into the theatre by the writing of two plays, *Vectia, a Banned Play*, and *A Preface on the Censorship* in 1926, and *Our Ostriches*, which was acted in 1923 at the Court Theatre and revived in 1930 at the Royalty Theatre. The latter was written as a vehicle to strengthen her advocacy of birth control.

MARY GARNHAM

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Complete Shakespeares in a single volume are obviously the most convenient for quick reference: there are many such, of which I possess the Shakespeare Head, the Collins (edited by Peter Alexander) and the Odhams (edited by C. J. Sisson), all scholarly as well as inclusive. The inevitable handicap of such editions is the double-column page, which makes prolonged reading laborious. With more volumes available, one can have the easier spacing and realise how much pleasanter it is to appreciate the line that has a page-breadth to itself.

The London Shakespeare, a boxed set of six books bound in dark green buckram, has been finely printed and, while the individual volumes run to about 700 pages each, they are not heavy in the hand. Seven guineas may seem a large sum, but each of the volumes does in fact cost considerably less than a single book of Shakespearean criticism, such as Mr. Traversi's which is an unillustrated volume of 200 pages. This criticism is not applied, of course, to the quality of Mr. Traversi's work. It is merely made to demonstrate the financial value of Mr. Munro's six-volume 'set', which should make appeal to individual purchasers as well as to libraries at a time when book prices are running so cruelly high.

Mr. Munro, a self-made scholar of the school of Furnivall and a specialist in old texts, did not live to see the product of his great labours finally published. So Professor Wickham of Bristol University has supplied the general introduction which, one may believe, is of the kind that Mr. Munro would himself have written or approved. The introductions to the separate plays and poems are Mr. Munro's and they are models of compact explanation of the source, date and existing texts of each. They are not intended to delve deep into literary criticism: there is plenty of that available elsewhere, and the opinions of famous critics are neatly summarised. The annotation at the bottom of each page, and the initial comment, are both useful and and concise.

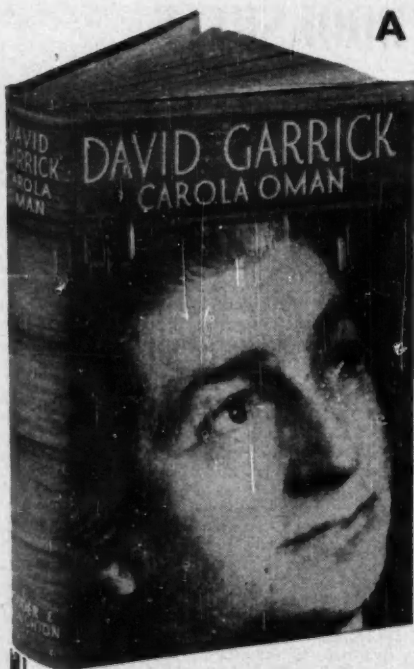
One may wonder whether there is any more to be gained now by investigation of the plays and of the thought behind them. There is work still to be done on the lives and workshop of

Shakespeare and his colleagues. Has Dr. Hotson anything new for us? He is due for another discovery. Much has still to be made plain about managerial and productive aspects of Shakespeare's theatre. How much rehearsal, for example, did a new play get and to what extent did the author conduct rehearsal? The evidence is scanty: but the texts are there and so our scholars continue to probe into these and sift every sentence of the dialogue. Mr. Traversi has applied himself carefully to the historical sequence from *Richard II* to *Henry V*, and traced the development of thought about usurpation, the royal office and the triumph of Prince Hal over usurpation's legacy. His work in the *Historics* ranks with that of Tillyard. Is there now any more to be said?

The subject of royalism is also handled in Professor Wilson Knight's book, which might be called a 'round-up'. He has been tidying up his many contributions to Shakespearean criticism and the contributed index is a guide to the whole body of his theories and interpretation. He is a critic 'known to his own'. Those who share his approach value his work very highly and will be glad to have this completion of the edifice, while they will regret the Professor's decision that he has concluded his design. A notable inclusion in *The Sovereign Flower* is an essay on *All's Well That Ends Well*, a play unattractive to many because of its theme and incidents, yet essential for study of the rich quality of some of its prose when matched with the comparatively jejune quality of the poetry. The general opinion has been that it was written or re-written when Shakespeare was at the summit of his power, which makes its poetical limitations the more remarkable. This essay shows reason for putting it later, *All's Well* has rarely, if ever, pleased in the theatre: but the failures of the greatest hand will always have their champions as well as attracting the inquiring mind.

Was Shakespeare driven to London (and glory) by Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote as the result of a poaching offence? Current opinion, sceptical about anecdote, is apt to dismiss the romantic eighteenth century legend. The fact that the story was built up and even equipped with some verses attributed, without much likelihood, to Shakespeare does not prove it wholly false. If Charlecote was not actually 'emarked' at the time of Shakespeare's youth, the neighbouring Fulbroke may have been the scene of the escapade. Mrs. Fairfax-Lucy discusses the affair judiciously as well as with a proper family interest in the noble river-side demeane and 'bricky towers' of Charlecote. Now the house, so long in the hands of one family, is a National Trust property, open to visitors and well worth

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visitation. Whatever the truth about the poaching, Charlecote, its park and its landscape have been, and remain, part of the essential England which cradled Shakespeare. The Lucys' chronicle has been that of a worthily enduring squirearchy and the authoress vividly charts the fortunes of the Big House and follows the life of a famous family down the arches of the years. Her book will make a rewarding prelude to any visit to the Shakespeare Country.

IVOR BROWN

## Seasoned Critics

*Pieces at Eight* by Walter Kerr. Reinhardt. 21s.  
*Lies Like Truth* by Harold Clurman. Macmillan. 42s.

Mr. Walter Kerr and Mr. Harold Clurman, both seasoned critics of the New York stage, are widely different in their style, approach and impact. Look, for example, at the view each takes of his own function. For Mr. Kerr (who punctures the legend of the Seven Butchers' omnipotence) the critic's job does not begin until the audience has 'returned its verdict': he is 'an onlooker who explains' and he must first explain why the play is or is not box-office.

The critic who attempts to reverse the judgment of an audience, to 'instruct' it in taste, is the critic who deals in lost causes, the Don Quixote of the arts—a bore and a fool.

For Mr. Clurman, the critic is committed to 'the search for a true theatre': he must 'determine the human significance' of a play, and evaluate its weight or quality of 'life', whatever the box-office returns may be—a quixotic mission, perhaps, in the light of Mr. Kerr's disenchanted empiricism. Yet these critics have in common a concern with the theatre's organisation and an inside knowledge of its practice (as directors) which sets them apart from their British contemporaries and helps to make their books invaluable to anyone interested in the contemporary American stage.

First, Mr. Kerr, whose *Pieces at Eight* is a brisk, witty, knowing survey of the Broadway scene on both sides of the curtain. Sometimes slick but always vivid in style, with an apparent dread of 'longhair' cant and cliché, he is a brilliant entertainer whose slippancy coats an acute understanding of plays and people. Whether he is attacking the tyranny of the proscenium arch or extolling the tyranny of the director, whether he is describing the shortage of villains or the surfeit of psychiatrists, whether he is pleading the necessity of the second-rate and the importance of the young playgoer, Mr. Kerr has much to say that is both amusing and true. Among his theatrical enthusiasms are Tennessee Williams, Marcel Marceau, Eugene O'Neill, Buster Keaton and Beatrice Lillie, and his praise can be as pungent as his 'knocking' (the easiest of

critical exercises). Yet although he attacks some weaknesses of the Broadway system, he seems inclined to accept its prime values, to identify the popular with the good: the anarchy, the waste, the hysteria, the cult of success are for Mr. Kerr, one feels, inseparable from the excitements of belief in the mystique of show business. The theatre, he reminds us insistently, exists to serve its audience, and the audience sets the pace.

Mr. Clurman, on the other hand, believes passionately in an alternative: 'We barely know,' he writes, 'what theatre means. We are interested only in the glow of the fruit and rarely consider the life of the tree'. He attacks 'hit-itis' ('the tendency to think of plays as hits or flops rather than as plays'); 'our insistence on a smiling or optimistic theatre'; the lack of continuity and development; the way in which the theatre's 'enormous scope' is limited by 'a petty psychology of ideas and historical perspective . . . earthbound by naturalism'; and 'the success=money=excellence credo' which pervades the American theatre. Mr. Clurman is a clumsy, somewhat solemn writer, and his reprinted notices in *Lies Like Truth* lack grace or sparkle; posterity will get no picture from this book of how the Lunts or Laurette Taylor looked, of what it felt like to be at the first night of *Death of a Salesman* or *My Fair Lady*. Atmosphere escapes him: he does not visualise. He is a conceptual, generalising critic, much better on plays than on performances. But in the field of drama, both in Europe and America, Mr. Clurman is an admirable guide, and his book is full of sober, stimulating, searching criticism, which always keeps in mind the situation of the theatre as a whole.

RICHARD FINDLATER

## Sir Kenneth Barnes

*Welcome, Good Friends* by Sir Kenneth Barnes. Peter Davies. 25s.

For many years the name of Sir Kenneth Barnes was almost synonymous with that of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, but as a young man he worked as a Civil Servant in the Land Registry and in somewhat dilettante fashion as a journalist. It was not until 1909 that he found his life's work. In that year the Academy of Dramatic Art, which Herbert Beerbohm Tree had started five years earlier, was in a poor way. The Council thought of closing it down, but decided to give it one more year. Those were the circumstances in which Kenneth Barnes, at the age of 31, accepted the post of Administrator. It was a brave decision.

By 1914 he had moved the Academy to new premises, made the financial position sound and started to build a theatre. When war started the half-built theatre was made weather-proof and Kenneth Barnes joined the army. When he returned in 1919 the Academy was again on the point of collapse and he records that the half-completed theatre was almost

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sold to the British Drama League. (I feel sure that this recollection of his is incorrect. The Drama League was inaugurated in July 1919 with a capital of only £400, and I do not think it could possibly have had sufficient money available to buy the A.D.A. Theatre. I know of no other record or memory of any such negotiations.)

By the end of 1920 Kenneth Barnes had put the Academy on its feet again and obtained a Royal Charter. His achievements since then are widely known, and well recorded in this book. He must have had much business acumen and administrative ability as well as cultural appreciation to build up the Academy as he did; but perhaps his most notable and valuable quality was his love and understanding of people. He writes more about other people than about himself. He had a way of making life seem easy, but he knew that it is not. He wrote that 'the spirit of self-discipline in thought, word and deed alone enables students to discern with truth the emotional and moral values within themselves. The outward expression of these human values constitutes the art of acting.' He also wrote: 'Looking back over the years, I am amazed that I should have come through my life's work without being floored by seemingly insurmountable obstacles and unseen pitfalls. For this deliverance I thank God and my friends.'

Sir Kenneth Barnes was a Trustee of the British Drama League from 1934 until 1952, a valuable member of its Council to the end and a vigorous supporter of its purposes always. His autobiography provides lively, informative and enjoyable reading.

ROBIN WHITWORTH

## Collections and Prefaces

Arthur Miller: *Collected Plays*. Cresset. 25s.  
Two Plays and a Preface by Nigel Dennis.  
Weidenfeld & Nicolson. 18s. Four Plays by Tennessee Williams. Secker & Warburg. 25s.  
Play Parade, Vol. V, by Noel Coward. Heinemann. 25s. The Plays of William Douglas Home. Heinemann. 35s. The Observer Plays with a Preface by Kenneth Tynan. Faber. 42s.

In the preface to his collected plays Mr. Arthur Miller traces his development into a successful playwright. He tells of the conception of each of his plays, the search for the fitting form, the intention behind the work, and analyses its effect upon the critics and the public. The most interesting passages are those about *Death of a Salesman*, where Mr. Miller deals with the charge of some critics that Willy Loman lacks the stature for a tragic hero. He writes: 'Aristotle having spoken of a fall from the heights, it goes without saying that someone of the common mold cannot be a fit tragic hero. It is now many centuries since Aristotle lived. There is no more reason for falling down in a faint before his Poetics than before Euclid's geometry'. He goes on to say that the terror of Oedipus lies not in the fact that we

respect the man, but that we respect the law which he so completely broke. Many critics failed to see that Willy also broke another law not administered by Church or State, but almost as powerful in its grip on men—the law which says that a failure in society and in business has no right to live.

Mr. Miller emerges from his preface not only as a writer of great power and distinction, which we already knew, but as a likeable human being of great integrity, acutely aware of the society in which he lives and, more surprisingly, as an optimist.

Mr. Dennis in his preface delivers a lively attack against religion and philosophy—the worship of 'Invisibles' which he claims are perversely invented by man 'for the principal advantage of the Invisible is that so long as it cannot be seen its presence cannot be denied.' Covering a large field, Mr. Dennis deals with one Aunt Sally after another, from St. Augustine to Guilt. In the face of threatened extinction he thinks we should rid our minds of all 'Invisibles' and concentrate on enjoying a world which is independently real. All this is stimulating and controversial, but what has it to do with the stuff of drama? The question remains unanswered by his plays, *Cards of Identity* and *The Making of Moo*. Intellectual dexterity alone cannot hold an audience, nor can satire which is bent only towards destruction. The drama needs its 'Invisibles', or its unregenerate audiences still seem to think so.

Mr. Tennessee Williams's collection contains *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Summer and Smoke* and *Camino Real*. Only the last, unfortunately, is prefaced by Mr. Williams's remarks. Re-reading the earlier plays one is struck afresh by the poetry of Mr. Williams's vision—a poetry which is completely integrated with the action and which is dramatic in its impact. This is never more apparent than in *Streetcar*, surely one of the outstanding plays of our time. In the stage directions to *The Glass Menagerie* Mr. Williams includes a device, omitted in production, of throwing an image symbolising the meaning of each little scene on to a screen on the set. Jouvett once said that a stage play had a three-fold existence: the play the author thinks he wrote; the play the actors think they act; and the play the majority of the audience think they see. I beg leave to watch what I think I see unaided by the author's lantern slides.

In an amusing preface Mr. Noel Coward remains his unchanging self and defends his plays and comedy against the drearier *avant-garde*. Professional to the hilt, perhaps his secret is that after all these years he is still in love with the theatre, and the disappointments, the disasters, the battles, the dusty *Sturm und Drang* form the world in which he is most at home.

Mr. William Douglas Home tells us of the ideas that led to the writing of his plays, except for *Now Barrabas* . . . which he hints

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## The "Observer" Plays

Preface by

KENNETH TYNAN

The seven prize-winning plays in this volume represent, in Mr Tynan's words, 'new authors, new idioms, new subjects, new approaches.' The authors are Errol John, Gurney Campbell and Daphne Athas, Ann Jellicoe, N. F. Simpson, Richard Beynon, Romilly Cavan, André Davis. 42/-

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# BLACKIE

wrote itself with little conscious work from him. He is so detached that he even says it might be a great play. Time will tell, but it remains a sincere and moving one.

Mr. Kenneth Tynan says that the seven prize-winners in the *Observer* Competition, now printed in *The Observer Plays*, are 'all plays of rebellion, plays that question the standards by which the great majority of people live, plays that are conducting a worried search into the nature of our unrest.'

*Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* by the young West Indian actor-dramatist Errol John, won the first prize. Set in a backyard in Trinidad this play is both funny and sad. It is written in an idiom new to our ears and achieves easily that fundamental of good playwriting of involving us with its characters. The second prize went to Gurney Campbell and Daphne Athas for *Sit in the Earth*, a pungent, exciting drama of the chicanery of an election campaign in the deep South of America.

The third prize was split three ways. Ann Jellicoe's *tour de force*, *The Sport of My Mad Mother*, defies analysis though it adds up to something new and exciting. N. F. Simpson's *A Resounding Tinkle* is a kind of living deadpan cartoon in which the most bizarre events are taken for granted. Satirical in intention and often wildly funny, its content is insufficient for its length. *The Shifting Heart* by Richard Beynon, another backyard play, deals, in an idiom that is vivid and real, with Italian immigrants and the hostility that surrounds them. The two honorable mentions are *All My Own Work* by Romilly Cavan and *Four Men* by André Davis.

The *Observer* Competition has achieved its aim of discovering new dramatists. The plays are alive and kicking—there is nothing second-hand here.

DONALD FITZJOHN

## Present and Past

**International Theatre Annual No. 3.** Ed. Harold Hobson. Calder. 25s. **Theatre World Annual No. 9** by Frances Stephens. Rockliff. 25s. **The Ballet Annual No. 13.** Ed. Arnold Haskell. Black. 25s. **Ballet of 3 Decades** by Audrey Williamson. Rockliff. 25s.

The most stimulating single contribution in the *International Theatre Annual*, extra-illustrated as usual, comes from Gerald Raffles of Theatre Workshop, who describes the company's vicissitudes and triumphs from its obscure beginnings in Manchester in 1935 to its present-day eminence as the company chosen to represent England at the Paris Festival for two years in succession. Incidentally, it was this company which revived the lost art of extemporising on the stage, and got into trouble with the Lord Chamberlain for doing so. Modelled on the *Compagnie des Quinze*, the pattern seems to be: effort, failure, lack of funds, effort, success, in almost random sequence, with never enough laurels to rest on,

It is an enthralling story, written with the urgency of a devoted theatre man.

Another courageous venture described in these pages is the saving of the old Shakespeare Theatre in Liverpool and its re-opening as a club-theatre giving new plays, with a membership of close on 20,000 by the time four plays had been presented. Sam Wanamaker writes vividly and in some detail of his new venture but he omits to tell us, apart from the first, what these plays were. J. C. Trewin who writes as before on 'Theatre in the English Provinces' also fails to tell us.

It is apparent that a good deal of tightening up of the Annual is necessary if it is to fulfil a really useful purpose. The articles often cover the same ground, cutting across one another and yet leaving out important things. Sometimes we are given a pyrotechnical display of bright phrases and snap judgments instead of informed criticism. As to London, 1958 will long be remembered as the year when the Moscow Art Theatre came. J. W. Lambert writes at length about their visit, but as to his charge of 'tampering with the text' of *The Three Sisters*, this change was sanctioned by Chekhov himself and what we were seeing was a faithful recreation of a period performance, a museum piece if you will, but what a museum! The producer, Josif Rayevski, told me he was at pains to produce the play with new young actresses exactly as it had been done by Nemirovitch-Dantchenko in 1940; he regretted only that the stage at Sadler's Wells was too small to show the birch forest scene properly. This chimes in with what Mr. Gordon Craig told me, that when he saw *The Cherry Orchard* in 1935, it was played and staged exactly as he had seen it on his visit to Moscow in 1906. What other theatre in the world preserves its own best efforts from the past in this way?

The overall impression left by this year's Annual is that there are many new dramatists around and that they deserve better critics: Robert Bolt, John Hall and Bernard Kops are allowed to speak for themselves. George Alan Smith's voice comes in from America proclaiming that there were thirteen new plays by American playwrights in New York and that 'a theatrical season is ultimately measured in terms of its new plays'. To balance this optimism, J-P. Lenoir writes from Paris that out of a total of 180 productions perhaps three were of value, a realistic appraisal. Articles on the theatre in Germany, Denmark, Australia, South Africa and India add to our sum of knowledge or confusion, whichever way you like to look at it.

After this mixed bag, *Theatre World Annual* seems sanity personified. A single discerning pen summarises London plays, giving their plots and fortifying opinion with cast lists and photographs. The elegance of the J-L. Barrault production of *Duel of Angels* revealed by this publication sent me straight off to the theatre.

## The GAY TWENTIES

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*The Ballet Annual* is too well known to need recommendation from me. To the ballet lover it is indispensable. This number contains a moving tribute to his silent friends (his books) by Philip J. S. Richardson; two interesting contributions from the lexicographer G. B. L. Wilson; the romantic ballet historian Ivor Guest on *Undine: The pure gold of Romanticism* as well as reports from all over the world and an interesting symposium on 'the subject matter of ballet' by nine leading personalities in ballet including Marie Rambert. There are almost a hundred illustrations.

*Ballet of 3 Decades* is a most welcome book, starting from 1931 and taking us up to 1957. Miss Williamson is a reliable and careful judge of all she sees and is right to ask whither English ballet is going now that it is domiciled at the Royal Opera House. Many of us have watched with grave concern the staging of one boring full-length ballet after another since it left Sadler's Wells. We need critics of this calibre who are not afraid to whisper (from the house-tops) that all is not well with the Royal Ballet in spite of its success.

JANET LEEPER

## Introducing Drama

*Great Moments in the Theatre* by John Allen. Phoenix. 7s. 6d. *An Introduction to Child Drama* by Peter Slade. University of London. 8s. 6d. *Religious Drama for Amateur Players* by Arthur B. Allen. Faber. 16s. *The Theatre* by Helen and Richard Leacroft. Methuen's Outline Series. 10s. 6d.

*Great Moments in the Theatre* recounts some exciting episodes in the story of the theatre. In the battle of the Globe Theatre Burbage and his companions had the same kind of struggle to keep alive serious theatre as we have now; they had to fight against such counter-attractions as bear-baiting and the sort of things that appealed to the 'groundlings'. But they won the day. The courage of theatre people is, of course proverbial—'the show must go on'! Molière's last appearance (in *Le Malade Imaginaire*) is well described. The great actor-dramatist dies at the end of a performance from a very real illness, and is almost refused a Christian burial. A most interesting story is that of the young Schiller, and how he came to write *The Robbers*. Mr. Allen is no blind worshipper; he shows up the weakness as well as the greatness of his characters and points out that Schiller was a far better poet than dramatist. Edmund Kean triumphs as Shylock after behaving in a most unorthodox way over contracts. Victor Hugo breaks down the old classical traditions of the French theatre and is pretty unscrupulous in the doing of it.

The development of the modern theatre is told through the founding of *Le Théâtre Libre* by Andre Antoine; the work of Chekhov; Dantchenko and Stanislavsky for the Moscow Art Theatre, right up to our own times.

Mr. Allen's book will appeal to 'old

stagers' as well as to the young who wish to hear for the first time of some of the great moments in the theatre.

Mr. Peter Slade is an expert on his subject and knows how to share his experience and enthusiasm with his readers. *Introduction to Child Drama*, a shorter version of his earlier work *Child Drama*, does not concern the theatre—it deals not with 'plays' but with 'play' and is essentially a teacher's book. The keynote is spontaneity and improvisation. The children are encouraged to use their imagination, and any attempt to be didactic on the part of the teacher is frowned upon. The danger of young children being encouraged to show off is stressed; getting up on a stage and acting before an audience is far from the purpose of these exercises. The children do not work to a prepared script; they build it up as they go along—it is *their* play. They are completely free and as far as possible undirected, except for the most tactful suggestions on the part of the teacher. They act (or 'play') in the round. There is indeed the simplest form of Method acting. But there is a definite technique in it all. A teacher must be aware of the difference between 'projected' and 'personal' play, which at first sight seems rather alarming, but the book smooths out many difficulties. For the children it is great fun, but I feel that teachers not blessed with Mr. Slade's imagination and sure touch might find it rather a nightmare.

The growing number of people who believe that drama has an important part to play in religious teaching are doing all they can to raise the standard of the production, acting and writing of plays. The Reverend Arthur B. Allen has experienced difficulties, but he has had the courage and tact necessary for encouraging the development of religious drama and his book should be of great practical use. He gives careful directions for the production of a children's mime of the Christmas story and in the chapter 'Pomps of the Devil' he gives an account of the development of miracle and mystery plays. Impressive for its simplicity and sincerity is a short play based on the story of the Good Samaritan, the script of which was written by a class in a day school under the guidance of Mr. Allen himself. The book also contains the full text of five short plays for use during Holy Week, together with clear stage directions. It ends with adaptations by the author of *Noah's Flood*, a Wakefield nativity play, *Everyman* and *Pilgrim's Progress*.

*The Theatre* is a slim volume, but it contains a vast amount of information about the history of the theatre from Greek times to the present day. Indeed, it is difficult to find any aspect which has been left out; theatre buildings, methods of production, stage machinery, the great figures of the stage, all have their place without overcrowding. Lavishly illustrated with drawings by Richard Leacroft, and a carefully chosen selection of diagrams and

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CECIL BELLAMY

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Although it deals with crime, this play is far removed from the common or garden thriller. It has an ingenious plot in which a well-bred woman runs a school for shop-lifters. Under the guise of philanthropy she recruits her trainees from young offenders leaving prison and others in shady circumstances. She collects and disposes of their spoils, rewarding them liberally and providing them with shelter in her beautiful house. All the characters are well-drawn and interesting. (13 w., 1 set.)

**To Settle For Murder** by Stuart Ready. Deane.

5s., should appeal to those who are tired of the run-of-the-mill thriller crowded with red herrings. The short cast is an assurance that there are no redundant characters. The construction is tidy, the suspense well maintained and the dénouement wholly unexpected. (3 m., 4 w., 1 set.)

**Ladies in Danger** by Elma Verity and Vera

Arlett. Deane. 5s., is set in a women's residential club. An interesting collection of characters includes a harmless but inquisitive old lady whose questions lead to her untimely end. After the attempted murder of another member, Scotland Yard takes a hand. A woman detective joins the club to run to earth certain members suspected of being implicated in a widespread dope smuggling racket. The leader is arrested but escapes the law by taking the short way out. The characters of varying ages are well defined and within the scope of the average women's group. (12 w., 1 set.)

**The Mayerling Affair** by R. F. Delderfield.

French. 6s. This very interesting play deals with the Hapsburg dynasty. The principal characters are the well-intentioned but weak Crown Prince Rudolph and a devoted girl whose strength of character is second only to her love of the prince. The play contains some powerful scenes which demand a high standard of acting. Costumes include some resplendent military uniforms. (6 m., 5 w., 2 sets.)

**Cash in the Kitty** by Dennis Driscoll. Evans. 6s.

An amusing light comedy set in a northern town. The principal character, Sim, a retired mill-owner, is president of the Supporters' Club of the local football team which is facing a serious deficit. Among other wild-cat schemes he invites a TV star to open the Summer Fair organised to raise funds. With press photographers in mind, she decides to have a go on the Flying Pigs. She hurts her leg which, she avers, is broken. She and her secretary begin to assess damages. This is a contingency against which Sim has not insured and it looks as though the Supporters' Club will be ruined.



But with characteristic ingenuity Sim finds a way out. The dialogue is lively and the characters varied. (3 m., 5 w., 1 set.)

**Never Say Die** by *Diana Marr-Johnson*. French. 5s. The setting of this entertaining comedy is a serious one—an East London Settlement. This affords scope for a remarkably varied and colourful cast of characters, each of which is very well-drawn. The play is full of lively good humour, sometimes broad but never forced. There is much work for the producer and S.M. The stage is sometimes overcrowded and the movements and crossings in the script need serious revision. (6 m., 5 w., 1 set.)

A. H. WHARRIER

## Short Plays

There must by now be many who look hopefully at a new comedy by *Seamus Fail*. They will not be disappointed in **The Guest of Honour** (4 m., 3 f. French. 2s.) In a Jewish family in Eastern Europe about 1900, the daughter is to be married to a bridegroom of her father's choice. Her lover is sent packing but returns disguised in rags as the beggar who according to Jewish law must be invited to the wedding feast. How he bargains with the choleric old father and tricks him into giving him the girl's hand makes a first-rate comedy in traditional style full of wit and character. The story has a touch of the Arabian Nights; it is told with freshness and verve and surprises up to the last minute. **Solomon's Choice** by *John Bertram* (2 m., 5 f. French. 2s.) has a double set representing two rooms some distance apart. A grandmother whose son's marriage has broken up tries to get back his young daughter from the mother, who is poor, to live with the father who is much better off. The characters are real and the problem is treated without sentimentality which makes the ending, when the parents decide to try life together again for the child's sake, quite satisfactory.

In women's plays it seems difficult to avoid the trivial, sentimental or contrived. The following succeed in doing so in varying degrees. **Up the Brook** by *Eleanor D. Glaser* (6 f. J. Garnet Miller. 2s. 6d.) is lifted out of the rut by the feeling of truth in its dialogue and characters, and the convincing country setting. A wife who gives more care to her home than to her husband hears that he has been making love to another woman, which makes her realise how much she loves him and the danger of her neglect. The rumour is proved mistaken but she has learnt a lesson.

Vitality and shapeliness are the most noticeable qualities in **A Matter of Fiction** by *Beatrix Carter*. (3 w. Kenyon House. 2s.) An eccentric woman who writes detective stories has trouble with her secretary, who understands her only too well, and a girl visitor who understands practically nothing. The humour arises from the clash of well differentiated characters and the form of the play is

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pleasing, with a situation in the first scene neatly reversed in the second. On its own terms, as a thriller, **For Fear of Strangers** by Peter Assinder (2w. Kenyon House. 2s.) also succeeds. Two women, cousins, are alone in an isolated beach chalet. One is apparently terrified by threatening letters but it is in fact her plan to murder the other. The emotional relationship between the two is strong enough to maintain the tension and they are sufficiently alive to make the plot convincing.

In **Three Daughters** by Anthony Parker (5 f. Deane. 1s. 6d.) a mother invites her grown-up daughters home in order to tell them she must go to the United States for an expensive operation. The three girls have their own difficulties and had hoped to get money from her, but recognising her need they manage to find other solutions.

Plays intended for children include two for Christmas. **The Road to Heaven** by John Ferguson (12 m., 4 f., chorus. Epworth. 1s. 6d.) is designed for schoolchildren to act. A group of youngsters are shown short scenes from the Old and New Testaments from which they learn the road to Heaven. The last is a tableau of the Nativity. The dialogue is easy to understand, with no straining after fine language, and the chorus speak in the normal way of ordinary boys and girls to-day. **The New Born King** by Beryl Strugnell (large cast. S.P.C.K. for Religious Drama Society. 3s. 6d.) is intended for schools with up to 70 children between the ages of 4-11 in the cast. It has twelve scenes, alternating with hymns and carols, depicting the Nativity in simple, dramatic form. Helpful production notes include stage plans for every scene and advice on making costumes. **Command Journey** by Frederick H. Wiseman (10 m., 5 f., Narrator. Epworth. 1s. 6d.) is a Morality play. There is no scenery, change of place being suggested by props. Two boys set out on a journey to take gifts to the King, one selfish, the other willing to help people. Children young enough not to find it too 'moral' would enjoy the play's fairytale atmosphere and its exciting moments.

CATHERINE PRYNNE

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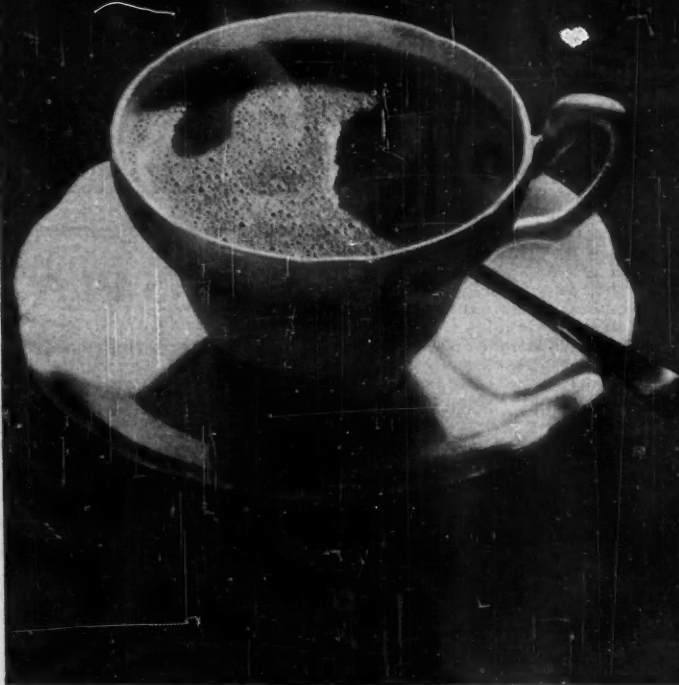
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PUBLISHED BY THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE, 9 FITZROY SQUARE, LONDON, W.1 and  
PRINTED BY THOMAS KNIGHT & CO. LTD., THE CLOCK HOUSE PRESS  
HODDESDON, HERTS